

TITLE: BUSINESS ACCESSORY ARTICLE WITH GRAPHIC IMAGE AND  
METHOD OF MAKING

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention pertains to an article of manufacture, such as a portfolio, desk folder, ring binder, wallet or similar business accessory article having an improved graphic image printed thereon by an image transfer process which includes transferring the image from a source image to a sheet of flexible material, such as vinyl, providing a protective coating or laminate over the image and adhering the image sheet to the article which may include a debossing operation.

BACKGROUND

*R!* Business accessory and gift articles, such as portfolios, desk folders, ring binders, wallets, luggage tags, keyfobs, memo pads and similar articles, are typically fabricated of a soft, durable material such as fabrics, vinyl, leather or other synthetic leather-like materials. The application of ornamental designs with graphic images or other pictorial features on the surface of the leather or synthetic leather-like material of the article is important and certain developments in the production of promotional and gift articles of the general type discussed above have been carried out. US Patents 5,762,375 and 5,961,150, both to Randy A. Kogutt and Michael A. Kogutt, and assigned to the assignee of the present invention, are directed to important advancements in the art of manufacturing articles of the type described herein. The subject matter of both of the above-mentioned patents is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

The above mentioned patents provide an article having a graphic image disposed in a "window" of the cover or other outer surface, for example, of an article such as a desk

folder or portfolio as described in detail in the patents. However, such a "window" may also be provided as a raised or depressed surface of the material of the article and an image placed in the "window" by providing the image on a separate sheet of material and adhering the image sheet so provided to the material of the article within the "window". Alternatively, the window may be simultaneously formed with application of a sheet or substrate bearing the image to the material of the article which is to be decorated with the image.

There is also a desire in the manufacture of articles of the type in question to be able to conveniently provide a virtually infinite variety of images to be placed on the article and to make the images aesthetically pleasing and durable as well as economical to produce when applied to relatively large quantities of articles of the type in question. It is to these ends that the present invention has been developed.